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AN INTRODUCTION TO JAPANESE SYNTAX.

BY- YOTSUKURA, SAYO

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IN A PREVIOUS PAPER (PRESENTED AT THE TWELFTH ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LINGUISTICS) THE AUTHOR POINTED OUT (1) THE RATIO OF SENTENCES WITH SUBJECTS TO SUBJECTLESS SENTENCES IN ENGLISH IS TWO TO ONE, WHEREAS IN JAPANESE IT IS ONE TO FOUR. (2) IF THE ENGLISH MAJOR SENTENCE TYPE CAN BE SAID TO CONSIST OF SUBJECT AND PREDICATE, THE JAPANESE MAJOR SENTENCE TYPE CAN BE SAID TO CONSIST OF PREDICATE ONLY. (3) BLOCH'S CONCEPT OF THE JAPANESE SENTENCE AS A PAUSE GROUP CONSISTING OF A PREDICATE ONLY IS APPROPRIATE, BUT HIS IDEA OF DIVIDING THE PREDICATES INTO TWO TYPES--FINAL PREDICATE AND NON-FINAL PREDICATE--BASED ON INTONATION IS NOT APPROPRIATE. THE CONCLUSION WAS REACHED THAT SINCE THE MAJOR SENTENCE TYPE OF JAPANESE IS NOT ONLY SUBJECTLESS BUT ALSO FRAGMENTARY OR ELLIPTICAL, IT IS NOT APPROPRIATE FIRST TO POSTULATE A KERNEL SENTENCE CONSISTING OF A SUBJECT AND A PREDICATE AND THEN TO DELETE THE SUBJECT. IN THIS PAPER, WHICH CONTINUES THE DISCUSSION, THE AUTHOR CONSIDERS JAPANESE AS BELONGING TO NEITHER THE LATIN-ENGLISH NOR THE CHINESE GROUP, BUT BEING A "BORDERLINE" CASE. ALTHOUGH SOME JAPANESE VERB FORMS (NEUTRAL, HONORIFIC, AND HUMBLE) LOOK LIKE LATIN SENTENCE-WORDS IN WHICH SUBJECT AND PREDICATE ARE FUSSED, THEY DO NOT REGULARLY INCLUDE SUBJECTS. IN DISCUSSING JAPANESE SYNTAX, IT IS USUALLY AGREED THAT A PREDICATE NEED NOT NECESSARILY BE PROVIDED WITH A TOPIC. THE IMPRESSION THAT IN JAPANESE THE SUBJECT IS OPTIONAL IS NOT ACCURATE. THE FACT THAT SOME SUBJECTS ARE OPTIONAL, SOME OTHERS ARE OBLIGATORY, AND STILL OTHERS MUST NOT BE OVERTLY STATED CAN BE COMPARED WITH THE USAGE OF ENGLISH ARTICLES. JAPANESE SYNTAX WOULD BE SENSELESS UNLESS IT IS ANALYZED AND DESCRIBED IN DETAIL FROM THE VIEWPOINT THAT SENTENCES ARE LINGUISTIC UNITS OF A LARGER CONSTRUCTION. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED MARCH 10, 1968 AT THE THIRTEENTH ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LINGUISTICS IN NEW YORK, SPONSORED BY THE LINGUISTIC CIRCLE OF NEW YORK. (AMM)

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An Introduction to Japanese Syntax

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Sayo Yotsukura
Georgetown University

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Last year I presented a paper entitled "The Major Sentence Type in Japanese---A Subjectless Sentence," here at the Twelfth Annual National Conference on Linguistics. In that paper I pointed out:

1) The ratio of sentences with subjects to subjelctless sentences in English is 2 to 1, whereas in Japanese it is 1 to 4;
2) If the English major sentence type can be said to consist of subject and predicate, the Japanese major sentence type can be said to consist of predicate only;
3) Bloch's concept of the Japanese sentence as a pause group consisting of a predicate only is appropriate, but his idea of dividing the predicates into two types---final predicate and non-final predicate---based on intonation is not appropriate.

With these three points as a start, I explained how subjects are used in Japanese and concluded that since the major sentence type of Japanese is not only subjectless but also fragmentary or elliptical, it is not appropriate first to postulate a kernel sentence consisting of a subject and a predicate and then delete the subject. Some of the opposing remarks made by the audience were:

1) The dichotomy of the major and the minor sentence types should not be based on mere statistics;
2) There is no harm first in postulating a kernel sentence consisting of a subject and then deleting the subject even when one is describing a language in which the majority of sentences are subjectless.

My counter-question to the first point is what, then, is the criterion for deciding the major or favorite sentence type. As for the second point, I should like to repeat what I said before: Theoretically, there could be two ways of describing an utterance such as "I will do it" in contrast with an utterance such as "I will do it at home." One way is to consider the sentence "I will do it" as the kernel and get the sentence "I will do it at home" by using the rule of addition or expansion. The other way is to consider the sentence "I will do it at home" as the kernel, and to derive the shorter sentence "I will do it" by using the rule of deletion. The first way with the rule of addition would be the one that is normally used in describing English. The second way is actually what you are doing if you describe Japanese in terms of sentences consisting of subject and predicate. The purpose of this present paper is to continue the discussion and to try to throw more light on Japanese syntax. The paper also seeks, as an ultimate objective, to suggest theoretically

what could be a good way to describe a language according to its own characteristics.

Hockett defines a sentence in his book A COURSE IN MODERN LINGUISTICS as follows(p.199):

> A sentence is a grammatical form which is not in construction with any other grammatical form: a constitute which is not a constituent.

He further says that (p.201):

> The kernel of an English sentence of the favorite sentence-type is a predicative constitute. This is true also in most other languages, and quite possibly in all, though there are subsidiary differences to be noted shortly.

He continues (p.201):

> The most general characterization of predicative constructions is suggested by the terms "topic" and "comment" for their immediate constituents: the speaker announces a topic and then says something about it.

His explanation of topic and comment is very appropriate for the purpose of describing Japanese, as he continues (p.201):

> In English and the familiar languages of Europe, topics are usually also subjects, and comments are predicates: so in John ran away. But this identification fails sometimes in colloquial English, regularly in certain special situations in formal English, and more generally in some non-European languages.

An example in colloquial English may be an expression such as "I will be only a few minutes." As an example in formal English, Hockett gives "That new book by Thomas Guernsey I haven't read yet." He says that "That new book by Thomas Guernsey" is the topic of the sentence, though not its subject. He appropriately says that the "subject-predicate constructions are one variety of topic-comment constructions, but by no means the only kind," Then he goes on to discuss a point which is relevant to our discussion today. He says (p.202):

> In Chinese the preceding generalization does not hold. The favorite sentence-type of Chinese is different from that of English. If we delete the subject from a simple English sentence, say We visit them often or I found a nickel, the lone predicate cannot function as a sentence of the favorite type, but only as a subjectless sentence (a command Visit them often! completive Found a nickel). If we delete the topic from a simple Chinese sentence that has one, the comment still can stand, in most cases, as a sentence of the favorite type.

Not only is this passage valid in the case of Japanese but the following statement of his is also quite applicable to Japanese (p.203):

> ...The tie in Chinese between topic and comment is to us usually loose, particularly if we compare it only with the usual tie between subject and predicate in English.

His Chinese example, which is literally rendered in English as I am thirty cents finds its counterpart in Japanese, as we commonly say watakushi wa koohii desu, watakushi wa bifuteki desu (literally, I am coffee, I am beefsteak).

Hockett concludes that this construction in Chinese is only superficially matched in languages like Latin or Spanish, "where the overt separate-word subject of a predicative constitute can be deleted, leaving in many cases a form that can stand as a sentence of the favorite type." One example he gives in this connection is Puer puellam amat, which could simply be Puellam amat. In his opinion this Latin construction is different from the Chinese construction introduced above because (p.203):

> the sentence Puellam amat still includes both subject and predicate, though the subject is represented only by morphemes within the verb.

Thus he groups Latin with English, rather than Chinese, and says (p.203):

> Since the favorite sentence-type of Latin, like that of English, turns on a predicative constitute, and since Latin verbs regularly include a subject within their own morphological structure, we call Latin verbs sentence words.

If we try to determine to which group---Latin-English group or Chinese group---Japanese belongs, we have to say that Japanese may be a borderline case. Just as in Latin there are in Japanese some verb forms which could be called fused morphemes of subject and predicate. For example, the verb yuku "to go", which is the neutral form, has in addition an honorific form irassharu and a humble form mairu. In other words, irassharu is either "you/they go" or "he/she goes", while mairu is "I/we go." The neutral form yuku can be "any person (including all the first, second and third person) goes." Thus, the subject of the action going can be implied if the honorific or humble form is used, although there is no regular one-to-one correlation between the verb form and the person of the subject; that is to say, in Latin amo is "I love" and "I love" only, whereas in Japanese there is always more than one possibility: the humble form can be the first person, either singular or plural, or sometimes the third person, and the honorific form cannot be the first person but can be either the second or the third person. The important factor in pinpointing the subject is the context. Thus, although these different verb forms---neutral, honorific and humble---look like Latin sentence-words in which subject and predicate are fused, they do not regularly include subjects. This is why in the earlier part of this paper I called Japanese a borderline case between the Latin-English group and the Chinese group.

In discussing Japanese syntax, it is usually agreed that a predicate need not necessarily be provided with a subject, although a comment is in most cases overtly given about a topic. As in English That new book by Thomas Guernsey I haven't read yet, the topic is not always the subject, so in Japanese to an even greater degree the topic is sometimes, but not always, given in the nominative, but quite often in the accusative, dative, instrumental, locative or vocative cases. The sequences It is not possible for me to do it, For me to do it is not possible, or I cannot do it are grammatical in English; the Japanese equivalent to these three would be the following two sequences: for the first one and the second one, watakushi ni wa dekimasen, and for the third one, watakushi wa dekimasen. In the English sentences the first person pronoun is used as the object of the preposition for in For me to do it is not possible,

while in I cannot do it, it is used in the nominative case as the subject of the verb. In Japanese expressions, one small word ni is the only difference between the two expressions. For me to do it may be the subject in terms of traditional grammar. It may also be possible to say that the phrase for me to do it is the topic and is not possible is the comment. It is usually considered that the Japanese expression watakushi ni wa dekimasen is equal to For me to do it is not possible, while watakushi wa dekimasen is equal to I cannot do it. Thus, even some Japanese scholars say that watakushi wa in watakushi wa dekimasen is the subject and dekimasen is the predicate. However, in more expanded form, we can say watakushi wa eigo ga dekimasen, which is literally for me English is not possible, rather than I cannot(speak) English. The particle ga after eigo "English" is said to be a nominative case marker; hence, English is the subject, but not I, which is followed by wa, a topic-introducing particle. Now if we go further to determine which is the subject if there is any, or which is the topic to be commented on, etc., we will be in a dilemma. After all, Japanese noun phrases that are said to be subjects have the same construction as those other noun phrases that are aid to be instrumental, locative, accusative, etc. That is to say, all these phrases with nouns as the head have the construction N plus particle. If you know Japanese, you know quite well how confusing it is to use properly the particles wa and ga. If you further try to determine which is the subject-predicate construction, and which is the topic-comment construction, you have to go into the field of logic. Indeed, quite often it is not too much to say that Japanese expressions are not only subjectless, but also topic-less or even comment-less. For all there is in an expression such as "Aa yatto sunda! (Oh, finally finished)" is a verb phrase. At least it is quite clear that there is no subject in this expression. We could say that there is no topic, either. All there is is the comment. However, can't we say such a comment IS the topic, or the center of interest in communication? Thus, in English where, as Samuel Martin says in his book ESSENTIAL JAPANESE (p.50) "every normal sentence has a subject and a predicate, and if there is no logical subject," one is stucl in any way, the subject can be easily determined by its form and/or position. On the other hand, in Japanese our effort would be fruitless if we tried to determine subjects or topics, since there is no clue in terms of the form or the position. At best what we can do in Japanese is to determine lexically who is the doer of an action, if it is stated at all.

What, then, is a sentence in Japanese? What are the necessary components of a sentence? How can a sentence be defined in Japanese? As mentioned before, Bloch concluded that the essential element of a Japanese sentence was the predicate. Samuel Martin, one of Bloch's students, says in the same book quoted above that (ibid. p.50):

> In Japanese, the normal sentence type contains a predicate---and to this we may add a subject or a topic, but it isn't necessary unless we wish to be explicit.

From this statement, we get an impression that in Japanese the subject is optional. However, this is not accurate. For example, we say in English "Jim saw Mary running in the yard," and tell what happened afterwards. If we try to describe a similar happening in Japanese, it is quite likely that who saw whom must be stated. On the other hand, in a similar situation, if the person who "saw Mary running in the yard" is the speaker himself, then, the subject is not expressed. The fact that some subjects are optional, some others are obligatory, and still others must not be overtly stated can be compared with the usage of English articles. In a very general and schematic type of description, English articles may be said to fill the slot before nouns optionally. However, if we look into the

matter more deeply, we find that in some constructions, or with some modifiers, a certain kind of article must regularly be given, whereas in some other constructions, or with some other modifiers, no articles must be given, and even in some other constructions, or with some other modifiers, articles are optional. How can we then determine in Japanese which subject is obligatory, which subject is optional and which subject is not to be expressed? In my opinion, we can have the whole picture of the rules only when we describe sentences as linguistic units of a larger construction, which is called discourse. It seems to be a normal procedure, however, to assume that a sentence is the highest level of linguistic unit. For example, as quoted earlier, Hockett says that:

> A sentence is a grammatical form which is not in construction with any other grammatical form.

Pike's unified theory, however, shows that human behaviors, both verbal and non-verbal, should be described in terms of a hierarchy. Just as smaller linguistic units such as phonemes or morphemes are described in terms of their feature, manifestation and distribution, so must sentences be described in terms of their feature, manifestation and distribution. Since our attention has been focussed only on the inner construction of a sentence, we fail to see the whole picture of sentence construction. To analyze and describe the inner construction of a sentence is, as it were, to describe sounds in terms of their points and manners of articulation. Just as the English p-sound has an unaspirated variant in a medial position, so the word Home can be a variant form of sentence which is possible only in the answer position after a question such as Where are you going? Japanese syntax would be senseless unless it is analyzed and described in detail from the viewpoint that sentences are linguistic units of a larger construction.

(March 8, 1968)